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ART NEEDLEWORK

THE ART OF EMBROIDERY.

III.

A DESCRIPTION of hand-embroidery stitches would certainly not be complete without a reference to chain-stitch, and yet it is one of those perhaps least used in modern embroidery. There are several objections to this stitch, and it is so exactly imitated by machine work that it is really waste of time to produce it by hand. For outlines it is much less pleasing than stem-stitch, on account of its hardness; and although it was fashionable in the early part of the last century for solid embroidery, it never presents so artistic an appearance as feather-stitch, or even solid stem-stitch.

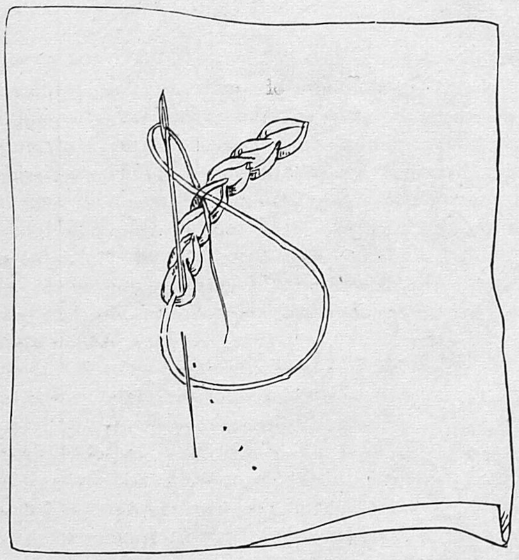

FIG. 8. CHAIN-STITCH.

In starting chain-stitch, the thread must be drawn through the material from below at the right-hand extremity of the design. The needle is then inserted close to the point from which the thread issues, and brought up at a little distance, nearer to the worker; the thread is passed from left to right under the point of the needle before it is drawn out, as shown in Fig. 8. The next stitch is made by putting the needle in the centre of the loop formed by the last stitch, and bringing it up a short distance in advance. The thread is again passed under the point of the needle before it is drawn out, and the effect is to produce a series of chain-stitches, with each loop springing from the preceding one. The work may be fine or coarse, according to the length of the stitches; but in designs containing sharp curves the stitches must be small, or they will look ragged and uneven. The thread is drawn under the point of the needle the same as in the well known button-hole-stitch, which is too familiar to need much description. Instead of working from right to left, or in a direction toward the worker, as in chain-stitch, however, decorative button-hole-stitch is worked from left to right. Great varieties may be made in it, whether used as an edging or filling stitch, simply by the slope of the stitches. The illustrations (Figs. 9 and 10) will be quite enough to guide the worker to begin with, and she may afterward diversify the stitch in any way she pleases.

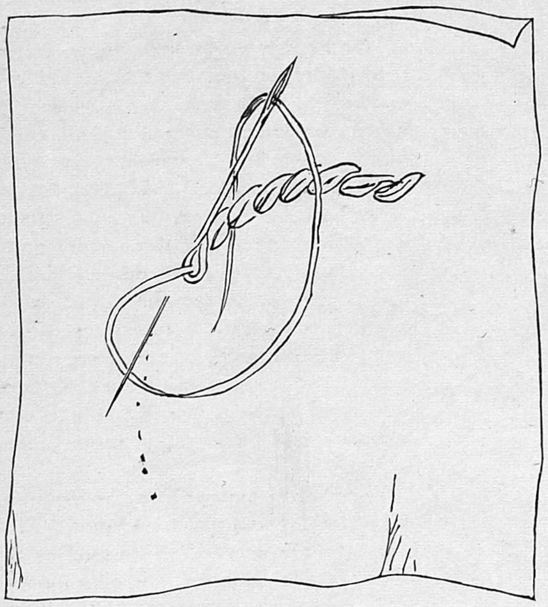

FIG. 11. ROPE-STITCH.

It should be unnecessary to say that in working the edge of a button-hole, the stitches are taken from left to right on the lower side of the button-hole, and the thread put round the needle each time with the right hand; this forms a kind of cord along the edge of the slit, and the same effect may be produced by the same manner of working in decorative button-hole-stitch for filling in conventional outline work.

Tambour-stitch, which was so largely used in the last century, in England, and in France during the time of Louis XVI., is, properly speaking, a frame-stitch; but it will be described here, because it is more convenient to do so while on the subject of chain-stitch. A small metal or wooden frame is required, consisting of two rings covered with flannel and arranged so that one will just slip inside the other. The material is placed over the smaller ring, and the other is then pressed down over it, fitting tightly on, and keeping the material stretched. The silk or worsted is held with the left hand under the frame, and the tambour needle, which is simply what is now known as a crochet hook, is held in the right hand. The frame requires fixing, so as to leave both hands free. The old tambour frames were generally provided with a screw, which could be fastened to the table, so as to hold the frame perfectly steady. The hook is pushed through the material with the right hand from above; it catches the thread below (the left hand being used to place the thread in the hook), and draws it up in a loop. The left hand, which holds the thread below the frame, regulates the length of the loop, and the needle is again pushed through from the top, and a second loop is drawn up through the first, and so on, following the line of the design. The effect is almost the same as that of hand chain-stitch, but it is much more quickly worked with the hook. The modern name no doubt arose from the drum-shaped frame, but the stitch itself is extremely ancient. It is to be found in very old Turkish embroideries, and is constantly used in Turkey now.

The disadvantage of chain-stitch for colored embroidery is its ridginess, produced by the necessity of working always in rows. That this difficulty may be overcome, and beautiful effects produced by careful blending of shades, the splendid draperies of Marie Antoinette, still in existence, conclusively show.

Twisted chain or rope-stitch is very much more effective and artistic than the ordinary chain, and is especially applicable for bold outline work. The first stitch is taken exactly as for ordinary chain, but for the second and all following stitches, instead of putting the needle into the loop formed by the last stitch, it is put into the material behind it, and the loop is pushed on one side to allow the needle to enter in a straight line with the previous stitch. The illustration (Fig. 11) shows the position of the needle in working rope-stitch. For bold outlines in this stitch, double crewel or tapestry wool may be used to great advantage. Much of the beautiful old crewel work used for bed-hangings in the last century was done in this stitch, and the designs being outlined in this way the leaves were filled in with any number of fancy stitches which it would be impossible to enumerate or to attempt to describe, but which could be easily learned by an intelligent worker from the sketch given (Fig. 16). There is practically no limit to these filling stitches. They are, most of them, variations of herring-bone or lace-stitches; but a clever embroiderer may easily invent stitches, and produce a wide variety. This is clearly what the old workers used to do, for it is very rarely that one finds the leaves alike in the ancient specimens of embroidery.

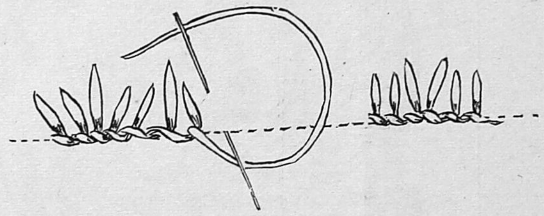

FIG. 9. BUTTON-HOLE-STITCH.

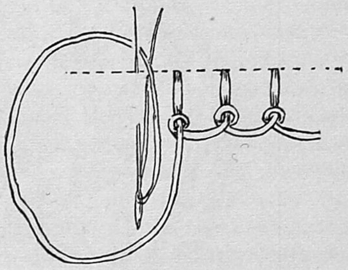

FIG. 10. BLANKET EDGE.

Herring-bone is really nothing more or less than a form of cross-stitch, and is almost too well known to require description. It is worked from left to right. The needle is put in, taking a small stitch from right to left; the thread is then carried across in the manner shown in Fig. 12, and a second stitch from right to left is taken on a line below; the thread is now carried across from left to right again to the higher level, and another small stitch taken from right to left. The stitches go on following each other on two parallel lines, from left to right, and the effect is varied by the distance that is made between the two lines of stitches.

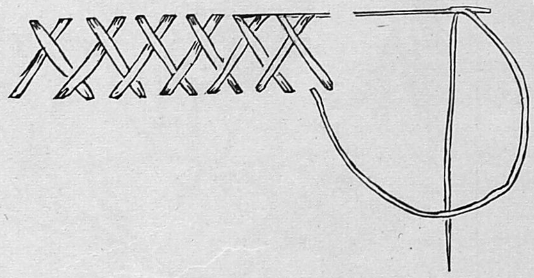

FIG. 12. HERRING-BONE-STITCH.

Another common form for filling stitch is what is commonly known among seamstresses as "feather-stitch," which must not, however, be confused with the feather-stitch of embroidery. This is a form of button-hole-stitch, the thread being always passed under the point of the needle, as in chain-stitch. The illustration (Fig. 13) will best show the form of this stitch. It may be

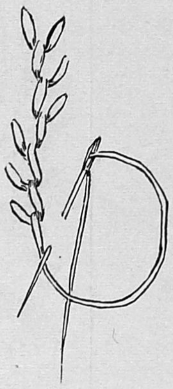

FIG. 13.—SEAMSTRESS' FEATHER-STITCH.

varied by taking two or three stitches together on one side, and then the same number on the other.

One of the most important filling stitches is the French knot, which is used besides for the centres of flowers, such as the wild rose and ox-eyed daisy.

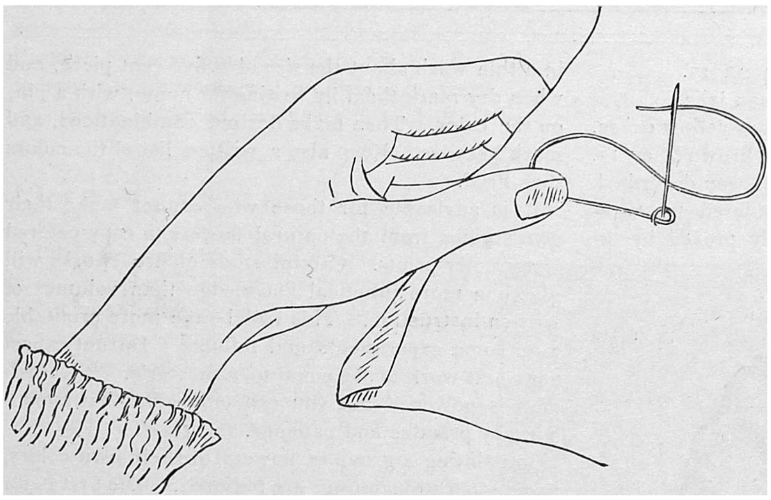

FIG. 14. MAKING THE FRENCH KNOT-STITCH.

The thread must be drawn through the material, as for chain-stitch, to begin with ; it must then be twisted once or twice round the needle, as shown in Fig. 14, and held steady with the thumb while the point of the needle is inserted as near as possible to the place whence it was drawn out. The effect is to produce a small knot lying close to the material. The next knot must be worked as close as possible to the preceding one, and care must be taken to make them as evenly as possible. Some workers prefer to use double silk or crewel to form a coarser knot rather than twist the thread more than once round the needle ; and there is no doubt that for a beginner this is a much safer plan, as it requires some experience to get the knots quite even.

Another stitch, now almost obsolete, except as a filling, is bullion-stitch, which was largely used in the Elizabethan embroideries. It is difficult to describe, although easy enough to teach by practice. A stitch must be taken in the material the length of the intended roll, the point of the needle being brought to the surface again in the same place from which the thread originally issued. The thread is then twisted eight, ten, or twelve times round the needle (according to the length of the bullion stitch), which is then carefully drawn through the tunnel formed by the twists, this being kept in its place by the thumb of the left hand. The point of the needle is then inserted once more in the place where it first entered the material from above, the long roll being drawn so as to lie quite evenly between the two extremities of the stitch, thus treating the twisted thread exactly as if it were bullion or purl. A reference to Fig. 15 will explain this description, the needle being shown with the thread in process of being twisted round it. When a sufficient number of turns have been taken to cover the space to be occupied by the stitch, the needle is inserted again at the point marked B, and the thread drawn tightly through the roll. For the next stitch the needle must be brought to the surface again at A, and the same process repeated.

The last illustration (Fig. 16) is an example of a portion of an outlined design filled with fancy stitches, such as are found in the English crewel work of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For the outline three stitches have been chosen—ordinary, coarse stem, twisted chain—and for the centre line stem-stitch. L. HIGGIN.

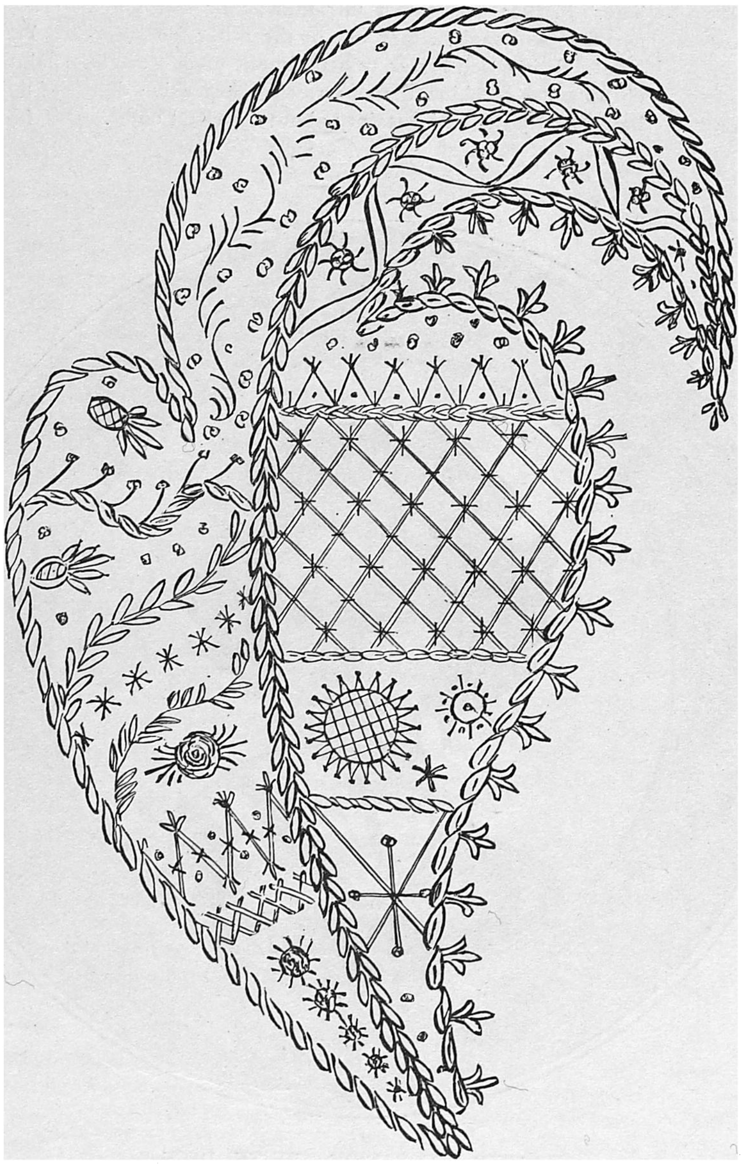

FIG. 16. OLD ENGLISH FILLING-STITCHES.

ANGLICAN CHURCH NEEDLEWORK.

I.

It is of course quite impossible in the limits of a short article to do more than touch on so wide a subject as church needlework. Embroidery for sacred purposes has been used from the very earliest periods, and the very names in use indicate its antiquity. The common word, orphrey, Dr. Rock considers to be derived from the gold ("or") embroidery executed originally in Phrygia. The beautiful chasuble of Byzantine workmanship used at the consecration of Charlemagne in 800, now kept in the treasury of the Vatican, shows the perfection of gold embroidery at that period. And the specimens brought together from time to time in the Loan Exhibitions of Ancient Embroidery, by the South Kensington Royal School of Art Needlework, and in the various churches and museums of Europe, all indicate the amount of money and time expended in the sacred service in all ages.

In the rebound from the Puritan or so-called Evangelical plainness of church decoration and furniture, the tendency is nowadays rather to go to extremes in this matter ; but with a difference which is not to the credit of modern society. While one sees everywhere now some kind of embroidery in churches, it is for the most part of a cheap description, too often bad in taste and in execution, and the materials used are too often of inferior quality. It is too much, perhaps, in these days to expect large sums to be expended in gold embroidery for our numerous churches ; but at least we might hope that what is done shall be done well, and that materials will not be used that give the idea of a grudging service.

The chief decorations in needlework for a church are of course the coverings for the altar, lectern and pulpit ; where the church is rich and can afford it, it is customary to have at least four sets of these—white for festivals such as Christmas, Eastertide and Trinity Sunday ; red, supposed to typify Divine love, fire and blood, therefore used on Whitsunday, and on all Feasts of Martyrs ; purple, the sign of mourning or penitence, hence used in Advent, Lent or Ember days, Vigils, Rogation days, and on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, except when it falls on a Sunday—in which case red is used ; green—supposed to be the color of repose, and used in Trinity season and at all other times when there is neither festival nor mourning. These are, at least, the regulations observed in churches addicted to strict ritualism. As a matter of fact most churches possess at least two sets, one of white for the great festivals and one of red which is for everyday use. Where only one set of antependiums can be afforded, red is the color most frequently chosen and if the clergyman is a great stickler for ritual he is content to hang a black or purple cover on the embroidery during Lent or on Good Friday. Various other forms of church embroidery are also used besides the antependium, without touching on vestments dear to the advanced ritualist, and bordering in the church of England on the illegal. I may mention the stole as now generally used, the burse, chalice veil, covering for the communion-table, cushions for the communicants, and, of course, alms bags.

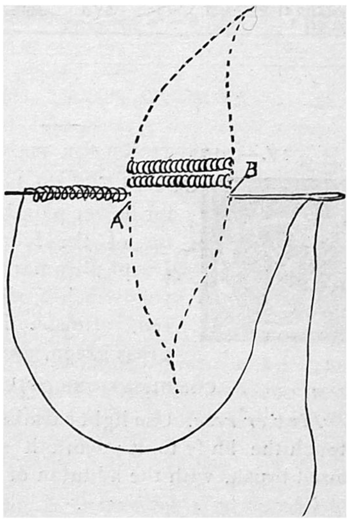

FIG. 15. BULLION-STITCH.

Whether the embroidery be on velvet or silk, for church work it should always in the first instance be worked in a frame on linen or holland, and afterward transferred to the velvet or silk. After the embroidery has been transferred, the enrichments in gold thread round the edges, the little spiral and radiating decorations, should be "laid" on to the ground and the whole work finished off neatly. In making up, a stout interlining of strong, even linen, should be used. This is better than buckram, which is too stiff, and is apt to crack and make ugly marks in the velvet.

For church embroidery, the best materials should always be selected. Unless a really good velvet be used it will soon become shabby and discolored. The same may be said of the silks. Filoselle ought never to be used, as the color cannot be depended upon for standing, under the influence of damp. As for the gold thread which forms so large a factor in church embroidery, it ought, of course, to be the pure metal, such as was used in olden times and which has been preserved, as bright as if only worked yesterday, in ninth century vestments. L. H.

(To be continued.)